Pharmacists

Pharmacists are experts in the medicines used to treat or prevent diseases or symptoms. They work with physicians, dentists and other health professionals who are authorized to write prescriptions. Pharmacists interpret and evaluate medication orders; compound, dispense and administer drugs; and advise health professionals and patients regarding the best use of medications for specific problems. Pharmacists also educate patients about medicines and help them make informed choices. To become licensed to practice pharmacy, an individual must graduate from a school or college of pharmacy that is accredited by the American Council on Pharmaceutical Education, complete an internship and pass an examination given by the State Board of Pharmacy. North Carolina has three Pharm.D. programs located at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Campbell University and Wingate University. UNC-Chapel Hill has recently partnered with Elizabeth City State University, and in 2005 the UNC-Chapel Hill/ECSU Doctor of Pharmacy Partnership Program was launched.

From 1983-1990 the state experienced a steady increase in the number of pharmacists but since that time the rate of growth has decreased. In 1987 the supply of pharmacists relative to the population in North Carolina overtook that of the U.S. The national supply of pharmacists per population increased sharply from 2000-2001 (Figure 66) and again between 2004-2005. While these increases in supply may reflect the fact that many new Pharm.D. programs opened during this period, changes in the national data sources used before and after 2000 may also account for the increase.

Pharmacists are more likely to practice in metropolitan areas and the supply of pharmacists has grown at a faster rate in the more urban counties than in nonmetropolitan ones (Figure 67). The supply of pharmacists in non-PHPSAs and part-county PHPSAs has grown steadily since 1979, while supply in whole-county PHPSAs has been relatively flat (Figure 68).

In 2005, Camden and Hyde were the only counties in North Carolina without a pharmacist (Figure 69). Forty-eight counties experienced a decline in the number of pharmacists relative to the population between 2001-2005 (Figure 70), and one county, Camden, lost its only pharmacist. Gates County was the only county to more than double the number of pharmacists relative to population.

Table 13: Summary Statistics for Pharmacists in North Carolina

Pharmacists per 10,000 Population

1979:	5.16
2001:	8.62
2005:	8.42

Total Active Pharmacists

1979:	3,003
2001:	7,060
2005:	7,293

Number of Pharmacists per 10,000 Population in 2005

Metropolitan Areas:	9.19
Nonmetropolitan Areas:	6.68

For the 11 counties designated as whole county PHPSAs*: 3.78
For the 27 counties designated as part county PHPSAs*: 7.46
For the 62 counties not designated as PHPSAs*: 9.16

County Level Data

# of counties increasing pharmacist supply, 2001-2005: 50
# of counties decreasing pharmacist supply, 2001-2005: 49
# of counties with no pharmacists in 2005: 2

*Persistent Health Professional Shortage Area